

# HIGHER EDUCATION PLAN FOR UTAH

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### Introduction

Utah's public colleges and universities have a strong tradition of educating and training individuals to meet the challenges of today, as well as the future. Indeed, there are thousands of current and former students who can attest to the positive impact of higher education on their lives.

In addition to the personal enrichment higher education provides for us, we know it has a major effect on the state and national economy. Business and industry cannot thrive in an environment without an educated and well-trained citizenry. The Utah System of Higher Education is a primary contributor to the state's ability to foster new jobs, new industry, and a better way of life for us all.

I have consulted with college and university presidents and their executive staffs, governing board members, faculty, political leadership, and members of the public throughout Utah and the nation. All are complimentary of our fine system of higher education. Yet, there is concern and consensus regarding the challenges our citizens face. In brief, these major concerns require strong leadership at the highest levels of state government. The essential issues may be summarized as follows:

*Affordability* - We are concerned about the cost of higher education. Nowhere is this more relevant than when we try to plan for our children's future education and training. No matter what one's goal, the cost of higher education is increasing. Wherever I travel throughout the state, I hear people asking, "Can I afford to send my child to college"? Or, "How can I afford to further my own education"? These are real concerns.

*Accessibility* - Access is important too. Will there be room for the students who will seek a higher education in the future? Are facilities or entire campuses located appropriately in order to foster access? Is there a range of opportunities for those whose interests may not lie in the traditional college experience? We need programs, which will prepare students for university graduation, graduate and professional schools. But, we also need programs to train technicians, craftsmen, and those with talents and interests in applied technology programs. In short, our citizens need choices for the type of education that best suits them. We must have quality programs at affordable prices, at accessible locations, and in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of our citizens.

*Opportunities for Career Employment* - In some ways, the most critical questions relate to career opportunities. Are there job opportunities for those who complete an educational program? Will we, or our children, have to leave Utah to obtain employment? Will we have opportunities for careers, not merely low paying jobs? I recognize this as a major concern. The answers to these questions are found in the health and diversity of our economy. In order to meet the needs of our

citizens, we must nurture, develop and attract those businesses and industries that will provide for well paying, career oriented employment. To attract these businesses we must be able to supply well educated, properly trained employees at all levels.

We must maintain the quality and productivity of Utah's higher education system. Our higher education system should be as efficient and as well organized as possible in order to realize the ambitions and potential of our citizens. Moreover, it is essential that we forge new and stronger relationships with public K-12 education, new and existing business and industry, state government and economic development to create an environment fostering a healthy and bright future for ourselves and our families.

In order to address the challenges and concerns related to higher education in Utah, I have prepared a 10-Point Plan for Higher Education. This plan responds to the essential issues of affordability and accessibility of higher education, as well as opportunities for career employment. The plan also recognizes the unique role and importance of each of our institutions of higher education in Utah, from community and technical colleges to research universities, as we endeavor to prepare our students for today's competitive, global economy. Further, the plan responds to the need to make Utah's higher education system as efficient as possible.

I urge you to study this plan. If elected, I will do all that I can to ensure that higher education is affordable and accessible for Utah residents and that higher education plays a dominant role in strengthening the Utah economy.

### **10-Point Plan for Higher Education**

1. Keep a college education affordable for Utah residents

Despite recent increases in tuition, higher education in Utah remains reasonably priced by national standards. There will be challenges ahead, however, as we attempt to balance affordability, access for all qualified students, and quality in higher education. We should:

Coordinate as much as possible state appropriations, tuition, and student financial aid strategies; this will undoubtedly mean also increasing need-based student financial aid but access for low-income students depends on it.

Work hard to keep tuition increases moderate over the long term but augment those moderate increases with adequate state support through the legislative process and creative financial mechanisms that help students and parents pay for higher education.

2. Unleash the full power of higher education to strengthen the Utah economy

Utah's colleges and universities have a good track record in supporting economic

development through job training and technology transfer. All of the various types of institutions, technical, community, and two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and research universities, contribute. For example, our two research universities raised nearly \$500 million in research support this past year, which created thousands of good paying jobs that we would not otherwise have in Utah. Our other colleges and universities prepare thousands of students to enter the job market each year. But our institutions can do even better if properly supported by both government and the private sector through steps such as:

Launch a five-year plan to invest state resources in research and development at our two research universities.

Create incubator offices within universities and colleges to provide assistance to companies before they are fully formed.

Encourage collaborations between local industry and university researchers through coupling grants.

Encourage support from higher education for small businesses (conferences, advising, and so on).

Provide incentives for universities to share their research infrastructure with local companies.

Provide incentives for higher education institutions to increase the number of technically trained graduates they produce for Utah.

Integrate higher education institutions into the business creation, retention, and recruitment process.

3. Grow our state system of higher education in a thoughtful, strategically sound way in order to sustain a quality education system that is accessible, affordable, and productive

Managing the growth of a dynamic higher education system is an enormous challenge that requires us to adjust to population shifts, technological advances, economic ups and downs, and a host of higher education constituencies each with their own agenda. Nonetheless, we cannot avoid the responsibility of providing direction and making hard choices as we face the prospect of tens of thousands of additional students over the next couple of decades. Resources are limited. If we spread them too thin, we guarantee mediocrity; if we do not spread resources far enough, we limit access. We need to:

Ensure that all qualified Utahns have access to a suitable opportunity in higher education.

Define with as much precision as possible the role and scope of each of our higher

education institutions and encourage them to excel at achieving their mission.

Develop strategies for growth that benefit both local communities and the State.

Use incentives wherever feasible to direct growth and incremental resources to both institutions and programs whose achievements, past and future, are demonstrable.

Give as much freedom as possible to institutions so that they can best serve the needs of their respective service areas while still retaining a statewide perspective for the higher education system as a whole.

Enhance higher education's physical and programmatic infrastructure over a period of years to be prepared for future enrollment increases.

Make full use of information technology in delivering higher education services across the State.

4. Encourage higher education institutions to do more for rural communities

Rural communities in our State benefit from our colleges and universities located in urban areas as well in rural communities. State government and our colleges and universities should work together to:

Recruit qualified students from rural areas and provide adequate financial aid so that these students can successfully complete their studies.

Increase access to higher education for citizens in rural areas by aggressively developing more technologically delivered courses and degree programs.

Find additional opportunities to connect faculty expertise with rural issues and problems.

Find and exploit opportunities for higher education institutions to provide leadership in promoting regional economic development.

5. Actively support the Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT) and sharpen its mission

A strong, focused UCAT is critical to the State's economic future. It is estimated that a large majority of future jobs will require some short-term technical training.<sup>1</sup> UCAT's place in our educational system has changed in recent years with some uncertainty still remaining. We need to:

Encourage UCAT to stay on mission and to not become a community college with a liberal arts focus.

Make sure UCAT is adequately funded.

Encourage cooperation between UCAT and our other higher education institutions.

Maintain UCAT as a rapid response institution meeting specific industry needs.

6. Acknowledge that higher education will need to become more diverse if it is to serve all of the State's citizens

The State, like the nation as a whole, is becoming more diverse. As of the 2000 census, ethnic minorities constituted 15 percent of the State's population.<sup>2</sup> In some elementary schools, ethnic minorities now constitute a majority of students. The growth in high school graduates that will occur in the next decade will consist largely of ethnic minorities. Higher education needs to prepare now to:

Work with the K-12 system to ensure that ethnic minority students are given the proper counseling and advice so that they start early in preparing for college.

Engage the minority communities where they live so that participation in college becomes a cultural expectation for the many rather than an exceptional activity for the few.

Expand scholarship programs designed to help the educationally or economically disadvantaged.

Strengthen advising and other support systems in higher education to address the special needs of minority students.

7. Keeping our institutions strong—a shared responsibility

Higher education benefits not only students but their families, their communities, and the State. The quality of our education system and its graduates attracts new businesses and helps retain existing ones. Our overall quality of life, individually and collectively, is enhanced by the colleges and universities in our midst. Therefore we must all step forward to support higher education. We want to be sure that our children have access to a quality education in the future, not just an inexpensive one. This means that we must attract excellent faculty and staff, and have adequate facilities and equipment. Success requires a collective effort:

The State must do its part in a rational, coherent manner. Funding for higher education must be a priority. Faculty salaries must be a priority.

Students and parents must prepare themselves academically and financially. They can

contribute by planning ahead and being aware of the many opportunities that exist to obtain financial assistance.

The business community can help by finding ways to support higher education; for example, by providing internships or helping build the higher education infrastructure of the future.

The colleges and universities themselves must do their part by allocating their resources in the most appropriate and efficient ways for both the institution and the system and aggressively seeking support from multiple sources.

Colleges and universities should be allowed to acquire an ownership interest in private business in exchange for rights to intellectual property they have developed: thus, passage of Constitutional Amendment No. 2 in the November 2, 2004 election is important to our future.

#### 8. Strengthen state funding of higher education

A recent study by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems shows that Utah operates the nation's most productive system of public higher education--that is, we get the most instructional value (students taught and degrees awarded) out of the dollars we spend (state appropriations plus tuition).<sup>3</sup> We can take considerable pride in this finding but we should not be complacent. Recent enrollment increases have in large measure been borne by the institutions without state support, and the institutions have had no help in dealing with rising energy costs. The institutions have had to depend increasingly on tuition. Despite very substantial increases in tuition, however, in the ten years from 1993-94 to 2002-03, core support (state appropriations plus tuition) declined by nearly 6 percent per student in constant dollars.<sup>4</sup> If this pattern continues, higher education's ability to provide affordable access to quality programs will deteriorate. To avoid this we need to:

Recognize that spending for higher education is an investment in our future, not just a cash outlay.

Provide state support for enrollment growth to maintain access and affordability but recognize that the costs of educating students increase even in the absence of enrollment growth.

Fund externally mandated cost increases such as those related to energy while providing incentives to institutions for cost reductions.

Fund operation and maintenance costs for new facilities.

Recognize that technical training is critical to the growth of the state economy but it is also more expensive; there is a clear need for differential state support for these programs (without such support institutions will be encouraged to drift toward least costly programs).

9. Strengthen the coordination between higher education and K-12 education

Higher education functions best when it receives well prepared, well informed students from the K-12 system. Historically, this has come about when K-12 and higher education have worked together toward common goals. Students need to make the best use possible of their time in K-12 and particularly in the last years of high school.

Increase the admission standards at our universities, particularly our research universities, to encourage high school students (including those students being home schooled) to be better prepared for higher education.

Require higher education and K-12 to work together to create multiple diploma levels for high school and require the Utah System of Higher Education to offer entrance to its institutions for students receiving the appropriate diploma.

Develop a win-win funding mechanism to encourage higher education faculty to deliver college credit courses within the high school setting.

Improve the integration between Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT) and K-12; coordinate programs so that in the final years of high school interested students move well along to technical certification.

Work with K-12 to ensure that eighth- and ninth-grade students, and their parents, are fully informed about the post-secondary educational options they will have at universities, colleges, and UCAT, and what it takes to enter and be successful in each of these several options. This would include material such as detailed information on the requirements for specific fields of study.

Fund the Century Scholarship program that encourages able students to complete their first two years of college while still in high school.

10. Improve the governance system for higher education

Public higher education is organized and governed in a variety of ways around the country. At the moment, Utah has a fairly complex structure with a board of trustees for each institution, a board of regents for the system, institutional presidents, and a commissioner. There are a host of decisions, strategies, and policies at stake. To ensure that Utah benefits from the best possible governance arrangement, we should:

Appoint a blue-ribbon committee to examine the options for governance and evaluate how well our current approach is working.

Identify issues that are best dealt with at the individual institution level; look for ways to devolve decisions to their lowest appropriate level.

Identify issues that are best handled within a larger, system-level framework such as system-wide strategic planning and coordinating the transfer process among institutions to ensure that it is as seamless and efficient as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> D’Amico, Carol. Workforce 2020: Work and Workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

<sup>2</sup> Perlich, Pamela S. “Immigrants Transform Utah: Entering a New Era of Diversity.” Utah Economic and Business Review, Vol. 64, No. 5&6, May/June 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, Dennis. “A New Look at the Institutional Component of Higher Education Finance.” Presented to the WICHE Commission, Boise, Idaho, May 17, 2004. National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, Colorado.

<sup>4</sup> “Budget History, Table 10.” Utah System of Higher Education 2004-05 Data Book.

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